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SUBJECT: Environmental Impact of the Current Crises on  
Zimbabwe's Wildlife

1. Summary: This report, focusing on the status of wildlife in Zimbabwe, will be the first of several related reports on Zimbabwe's deteriorating environmental situation. The combination of land seizures, economic pressure, general lawlessness, and hunger have taken a heavy toll on Zimbabwe's wildlife. Attempts to quantify the situation are difficult, but at the most basic level, it is possible to estimate the impact of poaching on Zimbabwe as follows, from least affected to most affected:

- large animals in national parks  
(negligible impact, possibly 2.5%);
- large animals in conservancies  
(minimal impact, possibly 5%);
- protected animals (e.g., black rhino) in national parks  
(limited impact, possibly 4-5%);
- protected animals (e.g., black rhino) in conservancies  
(limited impact, possibly 5-6%);
- plains animals in national parks  
(significant impact, in some areas as high as 30-40%);
- plains animals in conservancies  
(high impact, in some areas as high as 60%);
- plains animals on private farms in commercial  
agricultural regions  
(catastrophic impact, upwards of 90%).

Although these numbers and percentages are estimates, and subject to the inaccuracies inherent in estimation, the scope of the problem cannot be overstated. Unless steps are taken to limit the impact of the current depredation on Zimbabwe's wildlife, the country will face a bleak environmental future when the dust finally settles. End summary.

2. While Zimbabwe has received widespread condemnation for the devastating impact of poaching on wildlife, few reports have documented the full extent of the damage. Poaching -- both on private and public land -- has escalated dramatically due to numerous factors, including widespread hunger, movement of "settlers" into lands previously dedicated to wildlife, and the general breakdown of law and order. Many poachers kill animals in an attempt to feed their families. Many settlers kill animals while clearing new land and attempting to establish dominion over newly-occupied territory. In other incidents, commercial operators are taking advantage of the relative chaos by marketing "bush meat" and smuggling rhino horns. Some highly subjective claims, such as one group's allegations that "Ninety percent of Zimbabwe's wildlife has been slaughtered," have gained widespread circulation despite the lack of empirical evidence. However, while it is clear that wildlife has suffered from the current political crisis, quantifying the damage remains a Herculean task.

3. Many poachers throughout the country rely on wire snares, which indiscriminately kill any animal unfortunate enough to stray within reach. In other areas, communal farmers or settlers use packs of hunting dogs to flush and run down antelope, zebra, or other plains animals. Some landowners have reported a pattern of settler activity in which a settler will build a small stick-and-thatch hut as a hunting base, and proceed to poach all animals within range of that hut. Once the easy poaching is finished, the settler will move on, clear enough woodland for a new hut, and begin poaching the new territory. Although some of this meat is undoubtedly filling the pot of hungry settlers, much of this meat has reportedly made it to commercial butcheries in the large towns. Some recent reports indicate that poaching is reaching commercial proportions with international implications. Several rhino poachers arrested in July are suspected to be Zambians. Also in July, a group of twelve South African sport hunters was arrested while trying to export over 400 kg of game meat reportedly taken on an occupied farm. Despite claims that their permits were in order, there is no evidence of compliance with any of Zimbabwe's strict statutory requirements for international hunters.

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QUANTIFYING THE DAMAGE  
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14. Wildlife in Zimbabwe can be classified by its size, its protected/non-protected status, and its location, all of which affect the impact of poaching. First, large animals, such as elephant and buffalo, are more resistant to random poaching due to their sheer size and strength. A great deal of Zimbabwe's widespread poaching is opportunistic, and what is killed depends upon which animals stray into the thousands of wire snares littering the bush. Large animals which can break out of such snares might still die if snare wounds become infected, but many survive with few ill effects. Second, some animals, such as rhinos, cheetahs, painted hunting dogs, and pangolins, are protected (to some degree) by the GOZ; other animals, such as antelope, giraffes, lions, and leopards, are not. Much of the non-protected wildlife, particularly "plains animals" such as impala, eland, kudu, sable, wildebeest, and zebra, are widely hunted for food, while others are highly valued as trophies. Some of the protected wildlife is hunted opportunistically, while others -- such as rhinos -- offer poachers commercial benefit, but require deliberate and well-equipped pursuit. Finally, some wild animals inhabit state-owned parks or privately-owned conservancies, while many others previously lived on privately-owned commercial farms. Even now, some animals in parks and conservancies have escaped wholesale slaughter, while wildlife which inhabited regions formerly dominated by commercial farms has been almost completely hunted out.

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SIZE  
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15. The size of an animal has a direct impact on its susceptibility to the opportunistic poaching taking place in many wildlife areas. Although neither elephant nor buffalo are specifically protected under Zimbabwean law, both require deliberate and well-armed pursuit; needless to say, snaring has a limited effect such animals. (Rhinos are considered separately, below.) In Save Conservancy, for instance, while carcasses of 715 poached impala have been recovered by game scouts, only 6 poached elephant and 3 poached buffalo have been identified. Some large animals simply are not hindered by snares set low enough for the small plains game; other large animals become entangled, but manage to break out of the snare. Sometimes such snare wounds fester and finally kill the animal; in some instances, elephants have been found with severed trunks. In other cases the snares are shaken off and the animals recover with few side effects. Pursuit with dogs, similarly, is a tactic suitable for smaller animals, but dangerous for larger, stronger and more aggressive animals.

16. Elephant is one of the few species which has actually increased in number, even in the chaotic and lawless situation prevalent in much of Zimbabwe's rural lands. Conservationists estimate that although the Zimbabwe has a carrying capacity for about 45,000 elephants, the current population is more than double that number. The most recent survey, conducted in 2001, indicated herds of around 89,000. Using a growth rate 3-4%, Dr. Cumming, previously the Chief Research Officer and Deputy Director of the National Parks, estimates that the herds now comprise more than 100,000 animals. The largest factor underlying this phenomenal growth, in addition to the elephant's relative imperviousness to casual poaching, is the international Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) ban on the ivory trade. Under that ban, countries such as the U.S. prohibit the importation of ivory and other elephant products. Despite the ban, however, hunters (even American hunters) are still allowed to kill trophy elephants, and the current rate for trophy bulls is held at about .5% of the population -- which maintains both the population as well as the trophy quality.

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PROTECTED STATUS -- RHINOS  
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17. Black rhinos, one of the most endangered species worldwide and one of the few species to have officially protected status in Zimbabwe, have also been somewhat spared from the widespread devastation. Under Zimbabwean law, wildlife belongs to no individual, but a property owner or occupier can use whatever wildlife that can be captured or "possessed" on his property. Rhinos, however, officially belong to the GOZ. There have been a number of successful black rhino translocations, but even where the animals have been placed on private land, the private landowner is merely a custodian and not an owner. When Zimbabwe achieved independence in 1980, it was home to approximately 2,000 black rhino, with a concentration of about 1,400 -- the largest population in the world -- in the Zambezi valley. Widespread commercial poaching (defined as poaching in which the horn is removed for sale) decimated the black rhino population in the late 1980's throughout Zimbabwe, and the number declined to about 370. The GOZ established four

Intensive Protection Zones (IPZs) in state land areas, to concentrate available government anti-poaching resources on the few relatively high-density rhino populations that survived the waves of poaching. These four IPZs are Sinamatella (in Hwange National Park), Matusadona (on the southern shore of Lake Kariba), Matobo (near Bulawayo) and Chipinge (on the eastern side of Zimbabwe). Due to the intensive conservation measures undertaken, Zimbabwe's population increased to about 520 black rhinos by 2000.

18. Prior to the land invasions, almost 75% of Zimbabwe's black rhinos inhabited commercial farms and conservancies, with approximately 200 in the Lowveld conservancies of Save Valley and Bubiana. According to conservation experts with the World Wide Fund for Nature, "Since early 2000, the rhino custodianship scheme has been greatly undermined because of large-scale invasions by subsistence farmers into areas of commercial ranching land, throughout Zimbabwe. Peasant subsistence farming and rhino conservation are mutually exclusive activities. Hence the invasions into at least a third of the total area of the rhino custodianship areas in southern Zimbabwe have displaced significant numbers of rhinos out of their home ranges and thereby stimulated fighting between the animals, leading to many injuries and the deaths of at least two black rhinos. Habitats are being cleared for patchy settlement and extensive bush fires that have arisen in this process have swept through conservancies, killing at least one black rhino calf. "

19. Despite the increased pressure on the habitat of rhinos and the competition between animals and settlers, there have only been a handful of documented commercial rhino poaching incidents since 2000. Four incidents were confirmed on the Bubiana Conservancy, eight incidents were confirmed in Hwange National Park, and one incident was confirmed in Matusadona National Park. Several other incidents have been alleged but not confirmed. Many factors contribute to the increase in rhino poaching, despite an international moratorium on the sale of rhino horns. Conservationists implemented a massive de-horning campaign in the mid-1990s, but most animals' horns have since grown back, making them once again attractive targets. The lack of resources to support game scouts and anti-poaching units has decreased their effectiveness; the increasing "war-lord" mentality of many rural areas, where a powerful local man can take what he wants, has also been noted. Additionally, heavily armed "military" personnel were implicated in several of the poaching incidents around the Sinamatella camp in Hwange.

110. The total black rhino loss due to land invasions and associated snaring within Save Valley and Bubiana Conservancies is probably 15-20 animals. Losses in other areas, such as Gourlays, Hwange and Matusadona, could be as high. Recent press statements have suggested that some 50 rhinos, black and white, have been poached during the land invasions. The known losses due to poaching (as of early April, 2003) are less than this figure and do not include any white rhinos, but there will definitely be some rhino snaring cases that have not yet been detected or reported.

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LOCATION  
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11. NATIONAL PARKS. Zimbabwe has approximately 49,000 square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>) of state-owned "protected areas." Under Zimbabwe's framework, these protected areas are delineated as follows: national parks, safari areas (or parks which allow hunting), recreational parks, sanctuaries, botanical gardens, botanical reserves, and forestry lands. Protected areas in Zimbabwe currently break down into several major clusters, in which a national park is surrounded by safari areas, recreational parks, and forest lands. The most significant of these are: the northwestern Matabeleland cluster (Hwange/Kazuma/Zambezi National Parks, surrounded by the Matetsi and Deka Safari Areas); the southeastern Gona-Re-Zhou National Park (now part of the Transfrontier Park between Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique, along with several neighboring private conservancies); and the northeastern Zambezi Valley cluster (Matusadona and Mana Pools National Parks, surrounded by Charara, Sibilobilo, Hurungwe, Sapi, Chewore, Dande, and Doma Safari Areas).

112. Although parks have traditionally offered some protection from poaching to resident animals, that protection has evaporated under the current economic and political crisis. Dr. David Cumming notes that the international standard for effective park management runs at about US \$200-250 per km<sup>2</sup>. The extreme range is represented by white rhino conservancies in the KwaZuluNatal province of South Africa, some of which reportedly spend about US \$6,000 per km<sup>2</sup>. By comparison, he reports, the current Zimbabwe budget allocates about US \$10 per km<sup>2</sup>. Combined with the current political and economic meltdown, this lack of funds translates directly into less protection for animals: fewer

game scouts, fewer anti-poaching units, fewer vehicles, less fuel, minimal interest in pursuing poachers, and minimal sentences for those actually convicted.

13. Dr. Cumming cites, for example, the situation at the Sengwa research center, located in the Charisa Safari Area. Dr. Cumming lived at this location for almost twelve years, and has taken groups of graduate students to the research center for fieldwork for many years. The research center is surrounded by Chizarira National Park, Chete Safari Area, and communal farmlands. While the area has for many years enjoyed an abundance of wildlife, Dr. Cumming reports that it is almost completely decimated as of 2003. When asked whether wildlife could have moved elsewhere, he states that the lack of animals is certainly due to poaching. He notes that most Zimbabwean animals are prevented from large-scale migratory movements, such as those observed in Tanzania and parts of Kenya, by the geographical differences between the two regions. He also notes that Zimbabwean wildlife movement is limited by animals' territorial attachments to home ranges, dependence upon limited water sources, and circumscription by surrounding hunting and farming areas. Given that there is no place for the animals to have gone, coupled with the hundreds of snares recovered in the area, he concludes that they have been hunted to annihilation.

14. PRIVATELY-OWNED CONSERVANCIES. Prior to the commencement of the Land Resettlement Program, there were at least five officially-recognized, privately-owned conservancies (the multiple-property developments at Save Valley Conservancy, Bubiana Conservancy, Chiredzi River Conservancy, and the Bubi River Conservancy, and the single-property resort of Malilangwe Conservancy). The GOZ has sometimes refused to recognize the legitimacy of other conservancies, claiming that singly-owned conservancies such as Gourlays Ranch or Amcit-owned Twin Springs Wildlife conservancy did not meet the "official" definition of a conservancy. In reality, both Gourlays Ranch and Twin Springs occupy coveted property, while many of the "recognized" conservancies occupy marginal land in the drought-prone lowveld. (Note: In fact, when questioned about the status of single-property conservancies, GOZ officials usually launch into a history lesson and defense of the entire land resettlement program, claiming that the tendency of private landowners to go into wildlife operations in the 1990s actually threatened Zimbabwe's food security, necessitating the land-grab and redistribution exercise. The fact that food security was not at risk until after the land resettlement program devastated agricultural production is apparently moot. End note.)

15. Information provided by conservationists indicates that several of the privately-owned conservancies have been poached almost to extinction, while several others seem to be maintaining some of their wildlife. Gourlays Ranch and Twin Springs Conservancy have been heavily poached, while Gourlays has been occupied and both have been targeted for acquisition under the Land Resettlement Program. Chiredzi River Conservancy and the Bubi River conservancy, although not formally designated for acquisition, have been partially settled and almost completely poached of plains animals. Bubiana Conservancy reports that it has also been partially settled and heavily poached in the northern section, although conservation groups state that most of the rhino population has been pushed into the southern section. The pressure of this displacement on Bubiana's male rhinos -- which are territorial and solitary -- has led to fighting, injury, and several documented deaths, while there are several reports of commercial rhino poaching on the conservancy.

16. Both Malilangwe and the Save Conservancy have been accorded different treatment, and incurred different damages. Malilangwe, a 480-km2 conservancy which is singly-owned by a trust (in which an Amcit is heavily involved), is a very high-profile retreat which previously boasted an international jet-set clientele, and that factor may account for the difference in treatment from that accorded Gourlays Ranch and Twin Springs Conservancy. The manager of Malilangwe reports that while poaching has been an issue in outlying border areas, there have been no egregious incidents recently and there is currently no occupation or settlement. However, in a widely-publicized incident in January 2003, provincial governor Josiah Hungwe sent a letter to Malilangwe's Board of Directors demanding that two Zanu-PF connected Zimbabwean businessmen be co-opted into its Board of Directors. The management at Malilangwe reportedly forwarded this demand to the Board of Trustees who have not taken any further action, although they perceive this as an attempt to strong-arm money and gain influence within the not-for-profit organization.

17. Save Conservancy is a 321,355 hectare project which is jointly owned by twenty-three landowners (including an Amcit) who have dedicated their properties to wildlife production and management. Each property owner retains

separate ownership, and each is allocated separate hunting quotas, although all internal fences have been removed in order to facilitate the free movement of animals between the properties. Several of the constituent farms have been heavily invaded by settlers, and several have received either preliminary or final notices of GOZ acquisition under the Land Resettlement Program. War veterans and other occupiers have declared at least five of the occupied properties along the outside borders "no-go" areas, and conservancy managers and game scouts cannot even estimate the losses on those properties. The entire western game fence -- in excess of 80 km of fence, comprising 1280 km of wire -- has been cut down and transformed into wire snares, which now permeate parts of the conservancy. Conservancy managers have documented the impact of occupation through overflight game counts and settler/hut/domestic animal counts, and have confirmed the inverse relationship between settler presence and wildlife presence, with almost no wildlife visible on the "no-go" farms. Since August 2001, Save monitors have documented several thousand animals poached, over twenty thousand snares recovered, hundreds of poachers' dogs shot, and over a thousand poachers arrested -- without even taking into account the most heavily "settled" farms. Characteristically, the largest animals -- elephant, buffalo, and rhino -- have been the least affected, while the "meat" animals -- impala, kudu, eland, warthog, wildebeest, zebra, and other small animals -- have been the most heavily poached.

18. It is interesting to note that the GOZ has consistently promised the publication of a "Wildlife-Based Plan for Land Resettlement," supposedly addressing the claims and needs of private conservancies, since the land invasions were first initiated by the government in 2000. To date, no formal statement has been forthcoming, and private conservancies continue to struggle against the tide of occupation, extra-legal land grabs, and continued poaching.

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COMMENT  
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19. Conservationists note that natural resources are a safety net in hard times; it seems that the current hard times may have destroyed the resiliency of that net, at least from the wildlife perspective. The bitter struggle between new land claimants and title-deed holders has left many animal populations completely unprotected and subject to random depredation. While some specific segments of Zimbabwe's wildlife environment have been spared devastation, the environment as a whole has suffered damage which could take generations to repair. It will be little consolation to a future GOZ to possess 500 black rhino, or 100,000 elephants, if the ecology is so damaged that the land cannot sustain them. Tourism is one of the engines which could pull Zimbabwe out of an economic morass -- but only if Zimbabwe retains attractions and infrastructure sufficient to catch the attention of tourists. Continued destruction of wildlife resources could cause severe delays in the eventual recovery of the tourism sector.

Sullivan